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Local Tourism Professionals Represent Macoupin County and Litchfield at the 2006 Illinois Governor's Conference on Tourism

Macoupin County, IL- The year ahead just got better for the tourism professionals from Macoupin County and Litchfield who attended the 19th annual Illinois Governor's Conference on Tourism. With innovative, dynamic educational programs and strategic networking opportunities, the conference-themed *The Main Event: Winning the Tourism Game-* provided a game plan for enhancing tourism in the Macoupin and Montgomery counties and throughout Illinois. Together with hundreds of Illinois tourism and hospitality professionals, Macoupin County and Litchfield representatives discussed the outlook for international, national, statewide and local tourism, as well as learned about industry trends and marketing best practices.

"The 2006 Illinois Governor's Conference was this year's must-attend event," said Jan Kostner, deputy director of the Illinois Bureau of Tourism. "Illinois continues to welcome record numbers of visitors year after year, and after seeing the creativity and enthusiasm demonstrated at this year's event, I am confident we will continue to achieve and exceed our goals."

Illinois welcomed more than 90 million domestic visitors and nearly one million overseas visitors in 2004, according to the latest industry statistics by D.K. Shifflet & Associates. The Travel Industry Association of America states that travelers to Illinois spent more than \$24.5 billion on transportation, lodging, food, entertainment, recreation and incidentals in 2004. Travel to Illinois also directly accounted for nearly 300,000 Illinois jobs, including 1,000 new jobs in 2004 that generated nearly \$7.8 billion in payroll.

The conference, hosted by Governor Rod R. Blagojevich, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism and Visit Illinois, was February 22-24 at the Hilton Springfield. It featured educational sessions on the industry's hottest topics, including word-of-mouth marketing, diversity marketing best practices, heritage tourism, tactics for maximizing customer service, and effective Web marketing practices, among others. For instance, Nora Feuquay, coordinator of Macoupin County Economic Development, and Shawnee Tefteller, program for the Mother Jones Festival in Mount Olive, attended the Starting the Word-of-Mouth Wave seminar, which provided new ideas and strategies that will help to grow and enhance Macoupin County's tourism efforts such as the Mother Jones Festival and the Carlinville Christmas Market.

The speaker slate featured high-profile industry and trends experts, including National Tour Association President Hank Phillips, who outlined his vision for the coming year; noted futurist Watts Wacker, who discussed the major trends affecting the tourism industry; NBC technology expert and executive director of blackplanet.com Omar Wasow, who addressed evolving online travel trends; training/leadership expert and former Disney executive Doug Lipp, who shared his insight on the magic of exceptional customer service; and Fox News Chicago's NFL analyst and former Chicago Bear, Tom Waddle, who shared his inspirational thoughts on personal and professional improvement.

Cutline: Representatives from Macoupin County and Litchfield attended the 19th Annual Illinois Governor's Conference on Tourism February 22-24 in Springfield. Pictured are (l to r): Kris Skinner, Litchfield tourism coordinator; Nora Feuquay, coordinator Macoupin County Economic Development and Shawnee Tefteller, program director Mother Jones Festival in Mt. Olive.